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AP English Literature – 5

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Poetry Project – Romantic Period

1. The Romantic Period was a literary era in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries characterized by a wide variety of style, theme, and content. However, it was also an era characterized by much disagreement and confusion over its principles. Romanticism is a form of literature that deals more with an individual than society as a whole. The individual’s consciousness and thought process were particularly fascinating and made up the poems, stories, and novels that can collectively be described as “melancholy.” In addition to the emotional and supernatural content that decorated romanticist literature, there also seemed to be a lessening in conventions and expectations when it came to the structure and content of pieces; free verse poetry became very widespread during this era. One of the most notable and criticized author of the Romantic Period was Edgar Allan Poe.

2. “Annabell Lee” by Edgar Allan Poe

It was many and many a year ago,

In a kingdom by the sea,  
That a maiden there lived whom you may know

By the name of Annabel Lee;  
And this maiden she lived with no other thought

Than to love and be loved by me.  
  
*She* was a child and *I* was a child,

In this kingdom by the sea,  
But we loved with a love that was more than love–

I and my Annabel Lee–  
With a love that the wingéd seraphs of Heaven

Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,

In this kingdom by the sea,  
A wind blew out of a cloud by night

Chilling my Annabel Lee;  
So that her high-born kinsmen came

And bore her away from me,  
To shut her up in a sepulcher

In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,

Went envying her and me;  
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,

In this kingdom by the sea)  
That the wind came out of the cloud, chilling

And killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love

Of those who were older than we–

Of many far wiser than we–

And neither the angels in Heaven above

Nor the demons down under the sea

Can ever dissever my soul from the soul

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:–  
  
For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And the stars never rise but I feel the bright eyes

Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;  
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side  
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride,

In the sepulcher there by the sea–

In her tomb by the side of the sea.

3. John Cowper Powys was the first critic to comment on the oddly strong connection between Edgar Allan Poe and the speaker in “Annabell Lee.” The initial clue that led Powys to make this assumption was the fact the emotional experiences and tribulations that Poe’s characters go through were most likely experienced by Poe as well, especially when he lost his wife, Virginia Clemm. Clemm died in 1847, two years before this poem was published, and could have greatly inspired and contributed to the atmospheres in Poe’s work. Annabell Lee is described as a young girl who died in childhood. In comparison, Virginia Clemm is often described as a child bride. After Clemm’s death, Poe was an alcoholic and fell into a depression that would last until his death. It’s because of these facts that Powys is probably correct in assuming that the speaker of “Annabell Lee” is indeed Poe himself.

Works Cited

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